

REDISCOVER THE KENT COAST

with Pas-de-Calais and the Belgian Coast

From the White Cliffs to Whitstable, from Dover Castle to Dungeness, the coast of Kent offers manifold attractions to the discerning traveller. Here are walking and cycling routes, historical sites, the delights of local cuisine and endless vistas of rolling downs, blue seas and big skies.

Just a short ferry trip away, the Pas-de-Calais offers wide sandy beaches with French panache, while the Belgian coast boasts Flemish hospitality and seaside activities for all tastes. This book helps you rediscover three holiday escapes that you probably never thought of but that are right on your doorstep.

lonely planet

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Produced by Lonely Planet for
KENT GARDEN of ENGLAND

WELCOME TO KENT

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Dover Castle

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Image provided by Visit Kent

Left to right: White Cliffs of Dover, Kent; Market, Pas De-Calais; Middelkerke beach, Belgium.

WELCOME TO THE SEASIDE

Linked by busy ferries, the coasts of Kent, the Pas-de-Calais and Belgium form an oft-overlooked triangle of low-key resorts and gentle landscapes too frequently disregarded by travellers en route to somewhere else. But, as any local will confirm, there are a million reasons to slow down and explore.

Though separated by geography, these neighbours have much in common. A passion for locally sourced fare is apparent, with exploration turning up a mouth-watering spread of Belgian chocolates, buttery French cheeses and



Image provided by Visit Kent



sassy Kentish wines. Hemmed with wide sandy beaches, these coastlines offer all kinds of water sports, while big-sky landscapes and long-distance routes make this prime walking and cycling territory. The trio served in both World Wars, the latest chapter in a rich history that has bequeathed countless intriguing sights.

Of course each region promises its own distinct attractions, but wherever you go the hearty welcome and soothing landscapes will have you wondering – why haven't I been here before?



THIS IS KENT

Kent lifts the spirits with its landscapes and townscapes, rolling downs and wide beaches.

Botany Bay, Kent

Ringling England's southeastern tip, the sun-splashed coast of Kent offers diverse pleasures – food for mind, soul and body.

Hungry minds can gorge on Kent's intriguingly eventful history. Once a separate kingdom, over the centuries the closest chunk of England to continental Europe was a gateway for invading armies such as the Romans and Vikings. It was also on the frontline of both World Wars.

Kent lifts the spirit with its landscapes and towns, its chalk downs and wide beaches, its medieval Cinque Ports and gracious old Victorian resorts where Dickens and Turner found inspiration. With over 4,200 miles (6,700km) of countryside and coastal paths, Kent is a great place for walking and cycling.

If you're a fan of local treats, the county is a foodie's paradise of succulent Romney Marsh lamb, the country's finest fruit, slopes of sun-sweetened grapes, wire-framed fields of hops and restaurateurs who can't believe their luck.

And like a crisp tablecloth draped over the edge of a banqueting table, the famous White Cliffs announce to visitors in search of nourishment: welcome to Kent – the Garden of England.

Image provided by Visit Kent.

HIGHLIGHTS

The coast of Kent may be often overlooked by holidaymakers, but it boasts all the elements of the classic British seaside holiday. Spending a little time here reveals history, tempting cuisine, wide-open spaces and sights that have inspired artists and writers alike.

Dover Castle, high above the famous port, has stood sentinel over the Channel since Roman times. Nearby, **Deal** is a low-key seaside town with a sweeping seafront, quaint fisher's cottages and a mid-20th-century pier. **Sandwich** was once Britain's fourth city, but now this former Cinque Port is a charmingly historical place of crooked streets, musty churches and remnants of a glorious maritime past.

The **White Cliffs** are one of Britain's most iconic sights, whether viewed from a cross-Channel ferry or a beach towel. To the north, the **Isle of Thanet** hasn't been an island for centuries, but it's the ideal bucket-and-spade getaway with sandy bays shelving into shallow sea. JMW Turner found inspiration in **Margate's**

"The White Cliffs are one of Britain's most iconic sights, whether viewed from a cross-Channel ferry or a beach towel."

seas and skies, his time here immortalised in the cutting-edge **Turner Contemporary Gallery**. Meanwhile, Charles Dickens wrote studiously in **Broadstairs**, a town boasting the curving Blue Flag beach known as **Viking Bay**.

Kent abundantly feeds and waters its visitors. Britain's oldest brewery, **Shepherd Neame**, provides the ale and the county's sun, soil and sea yield wines, crisp produce, oysters and net-fresh seafood. And all along the seaboard are uncommercial coastal communities, from **Whitstable** with its artisanal boutiques all the way south past the wide arc of bay at **Hythe**, to the evocative landscapes of **Romney Marsh** and the shingle beach of **Dungeness**.



Image provided by Visit Kent



David Tipling, iStockby Getty Images



Image provided by Visit Kent

Clockwise from top left: Folkestone Creative Quarter, Kent; Romney Marsh, Kent; Botany Bay, Kent



LOCAL VOICE: DAVID FLYNN, RESTAURATEUR

What's the ethos behind your restaurant, The Allotment? Why Dover?

We strive to offer something good for everyone, including vegetarians, using local ingredients and our own produce. The space in this mid-19th-century building attracted me to open here – this former glass-fronted wine merchant's was exactly what we were looking for.

Where do you source your ingredients?

All our fish comes from between Dungeness and the Thames

Estuary, our meat from near Canterbury, our veg from around Wingham. We have wines from Chapel Down and cider from Biddenden.

What's your personal favourite on the menu?

A dish we call 'crying leg of lamb' – lamb slow roasted over *boulangere* potatoes, onions and garlic – superb.

Where else on the Kent coast can you find great food?

The Sportsman in Seasalter and Rocksalt in Folkestone are consistently good, as is the Goods Shed in Canterbury.

ITINERARIES

Walking the White Cliffs

Like a huge 'Welcome to Britain' sign, the spectacular White Cliffs extend for ten miles either side of Dover in a dramatic wall of crumbly chalk. Easily accessible from Dover, this four mile walk along the famous Saxon Shore Way rolls across the Downs, following the undulating cliff edge throughout to end at pretty St Margaret's-at-Cliffe.

Begin your hike with a visit to one of Kent's show-stopping attractions, **Dover Castle** (Harold's Rd; adult/child £16/9.60; ☎ 10am-6pm daily, reduced hours in winter), beneath which the cliffs are riddled with secret wartime tunnels. A short walk east brings you to the **National Trust White Cliffs Visitor Centre** (☎ 01304 202756; Upper Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mar-Oct, 11am-4pm Nov-Feb) containing an information centre, a cafe and a gift shop. From here an undemanding path traces the edge of the Langdon Cliffs to **South Foreland Lighthouse** (☎ 01304 852463; The Front, St Margaret's Bay; ☎ 11am-5.30pm daily), the first in the world to be powered by electricity. More white-etched paths lead walkers down into beautiful **St Margaret's Bay**, a break in the chalk cliffs filled



White Cliffs of Dover, Kent

with a flint-pebble beach. This is in fact the closest point to France (easily visible on a clear day) where many cross channel swimmers enter the chilly brine. It's also the site of the excellent **Coastguard Pub**, whose menu of seafood, imaginatively crafted pub favourites and good range of ales is a welcome sight after a day's trek. Head up the hill to the pretty village of **St Margaret's-at-Cliffe** from where hourly buses run back to Dover.

Cycling the Isle of Thanet

With few ups or downs, widescreen North Sea and Channel views, a series of fascinating resorts strung out along a sun-splashed coast and glorious sandy beaches all the way, this 10 mile Thanet cycle route, following the middle section of the Viking Coastal Trail, makes for a serene day out on two wheels.

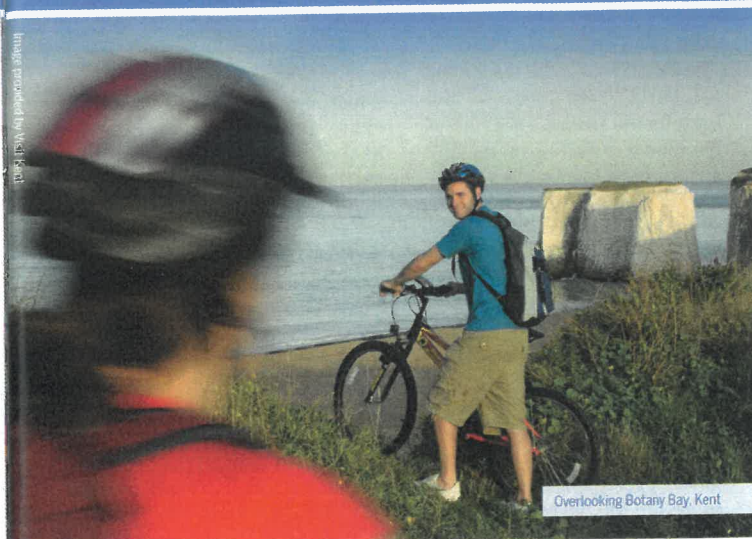
Starting at **Westgate-on-Sea** railway station, head north along St Mildred's Rd for 500m until you hit the **beach**. Turn right onto the coast-hugging Esplanade to join the **Viking Coastal Trail** which bucks and weaves from one sand-filled bay to the next until you reach **Margate** and its popular beach. It was the sea-refracted light here that so inspired English landscape painter JMW Turner and the resort's major draw card is the state-of-the-art **Turner Contemporary Gallery** (☎01843 233000; www.turnercontemporary.org; Rendezvous (Margate seafront); admission free; ☎10am-7pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun, to 10pm Fri). Pedal on through elegant **Cliftonville** to reach picturesquely dramatic **Botany Bay**, where tall, free-standing chalk towers and a glorious strand provide a superb spot

to shake out the picnic blanket. Next up, the quaint Victorian resort of **Broadstairs** where the **Dickens House Museum** (☎01843 861232; 2 Victoria Parade; adult/child £3.25/1.80; ☎10am-5pm Jun-Sep) vies with an alluring horseshoe of fine golden grains for visitors' attention. From here skirt the cliffs to the up-and-coming port of **Ramsgate** where you should follow a well-deserved rest on the wide, shelving **beach** with a plate of the southeast's finest gourmet seafood.

Historical Sights

Numerous invaders have left their first bootprints in Britain on Kentish soil and this relaxing drive takes in some intriguing sites associated with two of them – the Romans and the Vikings. It also stops at two medieval Cinque Ports (**Sandwich** and **Deal**), once charged with ensuring further unwelcome visitors stayed at home.

Start early at **Reculver** (admission free) where a Roman **fort** once secured the western end of the long-since silted-up Wantsum Channel. The eerie twin towers of **St Mary's Church** ruins can be seen far out at sea. From Reculver take the A299 to pretty **Minster** with its Benedictine **abbey** founded shortly after St



Overlooking Botany Bay, Kent

Augustine landed nearby in 597. A Victorian-era **cross** two miles east of Minister marks the spot where the pope's envoy first disembarked. Head east to hit the coast at **Pegwell Bay** where a replica of the **Viking ship Hugin** (at Cliffsend) commemorates the 1500th anniversary of a famous Viking landing.

From here head south to the quietly charming Cinque Port of **Sandwich**, one of England's true hidden gems with its perfectly preserved medieval layout and streets of half-timbered Tudor

houses. **Richborough Roman Fort** (☎01304 612013; Richborough Rd; adult/child £4.80/2.90; ☎10am-6pm daily) is just 1.5 miles north. The stretch of **dunes** beyond Sandwich has been dubbed the '**Regal Golf Coast**', lined as it is with course after verdant course. The links end at **Deal**, a gently historical seaside resort with a shingle beach.

For more information on cycle and walking routes visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent.
URL provided by Visit Kent

EATING

Flavour-packed, fresh ingredients from local fishmongers and farmers, atmospheric half-timbered dining rooms and Victorian splendour kept toasty with real fires, cosy tavern evenings nursing ale from Britain's oldest brewery and crisply chilled Kentish whites accompanied by sapphire Channel vistas – Kent is simply an outstanding place to dine.

The Sportsman (☎ 01227 273370; www.thesportsmansseasalter.co.uk; Faversham Rd, Seasalter) You never know what's going to appear on the menu at this down-to-earth pub, as

it features whatever's available locally at the time. But with a Michelin star on its lapel, you can be sure of savouring top-notch Kentish fare.

Rocksalt (☎ 01303 212070; www.rocksaltfolkestone.co.uk; 4-5 Fishmarket, Folkestone) Formerly head chef at Gordon Ramsay's Claridge's restaurant, Kent-born Mark Sargeant has brought his culinary prowess to Folkestone. Kent-reared meat, locally hooked fish, artisan cheeses and larders of other high-grade produce are crafted into exciting dishes at this top dining spot.

King's Arms (☎ 01304 617330; www.kingsarms-sandwich.co.uk; Strand St, Sandwich) Sandwich is locally celebrated for its atmospheric pubs and the King's Arms is possibly the finest of the lot. Real log fires warm the candlelit dining room, while you settle down to an intimate evening in the company of expertly crafted dishes.

The Coastguard Pub (☎ 01304 851019; www.thecoastguard.co.uk; St Margaret's Bay) England's closest pub to France shelters in a gap in the cliffs just metres from the Channel. This well-kept secret is good for both a coffee-and-cake stop following a cliff-top stroll or a full-blown gourmet meal.

Wheeler's Oyster Bar (☎ 01227 273311; 8 High St, Whitstable) With just four tables filling the quaint Victorian parlour, book well in advance to enjoy

this unforgettably distinctive seafood emporium in a seated position – the numerous well-heeled visitors slurping England's finest oysters at the counter probably didn't.

Eddie Gilbert's (☎ 01843 852123; www.eddiegilberts.com; 32 King St, Ramsgate) This award-winning gourmet fish-and-chip shop and restaurant above East Kent's top fishmongers boasts a Michelin-trained chef who exploits fresh seafood and other Kent-sourced ingredients to taste-bud-delighting effect.

Quex Barn (☎ 01843 846103; www.quexbarn.com; Quex Park Estate, Birchington) Occupying one end of the huge timber barn on the Quex Estate, this simple eatery serves nothing but the freshest, cooked-to-order food using ingredients sold in the adjoining local produce shop.

☆ AUTHOR'S PICK

The Allotment (☎ 01304 214467; www.theallotmentdover.co.uk; 9 High St, Dover) What goes into the pot here is Kent sourced; what emerges from the kitchen demonstrates the owner's commitment to putting Dover on the culinary map. Enjoy local delights such as slow-roasted Canterbury lamb, Dungeness mackerel and gourmet fish-and-chips in the dining room or secluded herb garden.



Fresh seafood from Kent

Images provided by Visit Kent

SLEEPING

Channel views are what it's all about at seafront and cliff-top hotels, but there are barrels of character further inland, too. If big hotels are not your scene, Kent's traditional seaside towns have homely B&Bs. Or how about your very own teepee atop the famous White Cliffs?

Grand Hotel (☎ 01303 222222; www.grand-uk.com; The Leas, Folkestone) Once the haunt of King Edward VII, this graceful chunk of early 20th-century grandeur contains suites of varying standards with kitchens and bathrooms. The ballroom and Palm Court restaurant teleport guests to elegant Edwardian days when Folkestone was a fashionable resort.

Bell Hotel (☎ 01304 613388; www.bellhotelsandwich.co.uk; The Quay, Sandwich) Celebrity golfers and visiting Cinque Port dignitaries expect nothing less than top-notch service and that's exactly what's on offer at these quayside lodgings. Rooms are understatedly luxurious, the restaurant sets high standards and the ballroom takes you waltzing back to more elegant times.

Molland House (☎ 01304 814210; www.mollandhouse.co.uk; Molland Lane, Ash) This romantic, Grade II listed manor house in the village of Ash has just five rooms, but what rooms they are! Luxurious sleigh or four-poster beds, a wealth of period features and breakfast

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

Walle's Court (☎ 01304 852424; www.walle'scourthotel.com; Dover Rd, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe) This spa retreat set in rolling green landscapes atop the famous White Cliffs offers a wide selection – from four-posters in timbered Jacobean guestrooms, to rustic beds in beamed barns, to a spot under an electric blanket in a teepee. An award-winning restaurant and numerous pampering options make this an unforgettable base.

in the impressive dining room make this a stylish retreat.

Royal Harbour Hotel (☎ 01843 591514; www.royalharbourhotel.co.uk; Nelson Crescent, Ramsgate) Overlooking Ramsgate marina from a grand cliff-top crescent, this boutique hotel occupies two elegant regency townhouses. Communal spaces have an atmosphere of cosy eccentricity while rooms range from maritime-style cabins to generously-cut doubles.

Glendevon Guesthouse (☎ 01843 570909; www.glendevonguesthouse.co.uk; 8 Truro Road, Ramsgate) This friendly, family-run guesthouse is ideal if you're self-catering and eco-conscious – all rooms have kitchenettes as well as eco-showers, energy-

saving hairdryers and guest recycling facilities. Breakfast is communal; the art is for sale.

Dover Marina Hotel (☎ 01304 203633; www.dovermarinahotel.co.uk; Waterloo Crescent, Dover) The 21st-century comforts combine seamlessly with 19th-century splendour at these newly refurbished digs. A grand seafront location, flawlessly turned-out guestrooms and a couple of decent eateries make this a real treat.

Royal Hotel (☎ 01304 375555; www.theroyalhotel.com; Beach St, Deal) Balanced above the shingle of Deal beach, the rooms to go for here are the those with sea-view balconies. Nelson was a regular guest; Churchill once ate here – now it's your turn.



Image provided by Visit Kent

Walle's Court, Kent

LOCAL PRODUCE

They don't call Kent the 'Garden of England' for nothing; food-loving visitors are truly spoilt for choice when it comes to local goodies. The county's unrivalled fruit and veg kick off the feast, which continues with succulent Romney Marsh lamb, England's finest wines and great ales, not to mention locally harvested fish and oysters.

Shepherd Neame Brewery

(☎ 01795 532206; www.shepherdneame.co.uk; 17 Court St, Faversham) Though you can sip Shepherd Neame ales across the county, there's

something about sampling Kent's hop-fragrant tippie at the source. Take a tour of Britain's oldest and greenest brewery to see how traditional ale is made.

Chapel Down Winery

(☎ 01580 763033; www.englishwinesgroup.com; Small Hythe Road, Tenterden) Anyone who sniggers at English wine has evidently never been to Tenterden and its award-winning winery. Join a tour (May-October only) to see how Chapel Down gets all that Kentish sunshine into a bottle, then head for the shop, credit card unsheathed.

Wingham Country Market

(☎ 01227 720567; www.winghamcountrymarket.co.uk; Shatterling, Wingham) This wholly ungentrified country market between Canterbury and Sandwich is where many East Kent locals go for huge bags of locally-grown Cox apples, carrots and potatoes, as well as crusty bread, home-baked cakes, locally pressed fruit juices and other delicacies from small-scale village producers.

Macknade Fine Foods

(☎ 01795 534497; www.macknade.com; Selling Rd & 4/5 West Street, Faversham) A kind of Kent produce supermarket stocking myriad produce from Kent's artisan cooks, brewers, distillers and vintners as well as top-quality foodstuffs from London's Covent Garden Market. One

branch is located just off the M2 motorway, the other in Faversham town centre.

Biddenden Vineyards

(☎ 01580 291726; www.biddendenvineyards.com; Gribble Bridge Lane, Biddenden) Although best known for its sparkling wines, this vineyard 20km west of Ashford was voted Kent's best cider producer in 2010. Both can be sampled on tours which run free of charge on certain days – check the website.

Quex Barn (☎ 01843 846103; www.quexbarn.com; Quex Park Estate, Birchington)

Enter this mammoth timber barn to discover a superstore of Kentish fare. Quex have their own brand of local produce sold by a resident fishmonger and butcher as well as a wide range of county favourites.

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

The Goods Shed (☎ 01227 459153; www.thegoodshed.co.uk; Station Road

West, Canterbury) Located next to Canterbury's West Station in an atmospheric old Victorian locomotive shed, this is the city's most central source of Kentish produce, carted in daily from the surrounding countryside. Tightly packed stalls proffering speciality cheeses, obscure wines, micro-brewed beers, locally reared free-range meat and Kent's flavoursome fruit and veg spread out like a 3D menu below the first-rate restaurant.



The Goods Shed, Canterbury, Kent

LOCAL VOICE: MICHAEL DOWNING – KENT CYCLING GREETER

What does your role as Greeter involve?

As a Greeter I hope to guide visitors, especially from Europe, on Kent's minor roads and tracks on bicycles.

What are the highlights of the coast of Kent?

The Kent coastline is extraordinarily varied. Ramblers can look at passing ships and over to France when following the Saxon Shore Way from Dover Langdon Cliffs to Kingsdown via St Margarets. Wind surfers can speed across

Pegwell Bay or race to and fro off Kingsdown. Kayak owners can paddle the shore off Deal or follow the River Stour to Sandwich.

Do you have a favourite cycling route?

My favourite route is the traffic-free millenium cycle path between the Red Lion at St Margarets at Cliff, along Kingsdown Rd and down to Under Cliff Rd, Kingsdown. The views of the fields, woods and sea are exceptional.

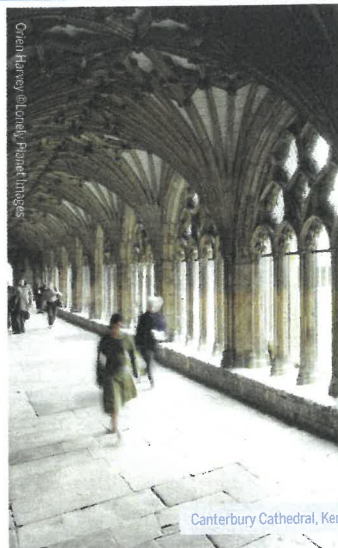
INLAND DAY TRIPS

Kent's top visitor destination is the buzzing city of **Canterbury** where a gaggle of Unesco-listed attractions is headed by the magnificent **Cathedral** (☎01227 762862; www.canterbury-cathedral.org; adult/child £9/6; ☎9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-2.30pm Sun). Pilgrims once flooded the city to see a medieval crime scene – the spot where Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered in 1170. Now tourists arrive in similar numbers. Away from ecclesiastical delights, shopaholics will require rehab after Canterbury's **boutiques** and malls, and the new **Marlowe Theatre** (www.marlowetheatre.com) is set to become the southeast's top stage.

Reflected photogenically in its own glassy lake, **Leeds Castle** (☎01622 765400; www.leeds-castle.com; adult/child £18.50/11; ☎10.30am-5pm daily) east of Maidstone is, for many, one of the world's most idyllic noble piles. Home to many queens over the centuries (including King Henry VIII's first wife, Catherine of Aragon) it gained its current neo-Tudor appearance in the early 19th century. You'll need a day to see the castle and all the estate's attractions – such as falconry

demonstrations, the hedge maze and possibly the world's only Dog Collar Museum.

Dickens fans should head to pretty **Rochester** on the Medway River, where the great novelist spent some of his early and later life. The literary theme continues at **Baggins Book Bazaar** (www.bagginsbooks.co.uk; 19 High St), Britain's biggest secondhand bookshop. **Rochester Cathedral** (www.rochester-cathedral.org; ☎7.30am-6pm, to 5pm Sat), founded in 604, is England's second-oldest.



Canterbury Cathedral, Kent

THIS IS THE BELGIAN COAST

As you meander along the coast you'll discover each resort has its own distinct vibe.



Belgian Coast beach

Sanne Grootenboer

One of Europe's neglected corners, the cosmopolitan Belgian Coast offers everything from family-friendly resorts to Michelin-starred restaurants, adventure sports to miles and miles of sandy beaches.

Stretching 67km from end to end and fringed with golden sands, rolling dunes and big skies, the Belgian Coast makes a quick and easy weekend escape. Try land yachting or kitesurfing in De Panne, discover the chic boutiques and gourmet restaurants of Oostende, wow the kids in Blankenberge, or roll up to swanky Knokke-Heist in your designer best. Described as the St-Tropez of Belgium, this wealthy resort drips with chichi shops, art galleries and flash cars.

As you meander along the coast you'll discover each resort has its own distinct vibe, so whether you're into quiet strolls along the promenade, testing your mettle, or just enjoying some of the best *moules frites* on the planet, coastal Belgium has something for you. Besides, it's incredibly easy to get to – one visit and you'll be wondering why you didn't do it a long time ago.

HIGHLIGHTS

Just a stone's throw from the French border, De Panne's wide beach is one of Europe's largest. Popular with families as well as sports fanatics, it's a world away from the beautiful Belle Époque villas of stately suburb Dumont.

In nearby **Koksijde** you'll find a **museum** dedicated to Paul Delvaux, the Belgian surrealist, while in **Oostduinkerke** you can see fishers catching shrimp on horseback. Immaculately-kept **Nieuwpoort** has an altogether different feel, with streets lined with medieval buildings, northern Europe's largest **marina** and some wonderful seafood.

Families will enjoy the relaxed atmosphere in **Middelkerke-Westende** where they can try out the lopsided **Dronkenput** and enjoy the statues of comic-book characters along the promenade. In cosmopolitan **Oostende**, the coast's only city, you'll find excellent shopping and restaurants, vibrant nightlife and a bustling **beachfront**. It's also the home of the **Mu.ZEE** art museum and the house of Belgian artist

"Immaculately kept Nieuwpoort has an altogether different feel, with streets lined with medieval buildings."

James Ensor. Maritime history is also well represented, with the Mercator and Amandine both anchored here and historic Fort Napoleon nearby.

In **Bredene** the coast is left undeveloped and the dunes glide silently into the sea. Old world **De Haan-Wenduine** is one of the coast's most picturesque towns, with mock-Tudor houses and Belle Époque villas flanking leafy greens and quiet lanes. **Blankenberge**, just along the coast, is a bustling family resort with plenty of water sports, a sea-life centre and 1930s pier. Another few kilometres and you'll reach **Zeebrugge** where the old fish market has been turned into a **maritime theme park**, while in stylish **Knokke-Heist** you'll find designer shopping and art galleries on every corner.



Image provided by Westfleur



Image provided by Westfleur



Image provided by Westfleur

Clockwise from top left: Shrimp and Rodenbach beer; Dunes at Koksijde, the Belgian Coast; Zeebrugge, the Belgian Coast

LOCAL VOICE: VEERLE DE GRYSSE, CHAMPION LAND YACHTER

Why land yachting?

I was 13 and looking for an outdoor sport, but wanted it to be something different. I liked the sea and land yachting gave me a real sense of freedom. The combination of speed and silence is very thrilling. I soon started to compete and within four years I won second place at the World Championships.

Why here?

The beach in De Panne is perfect for land yachting. It's

one of the largest in Europe and you can sail for 30km without stopping.

Can anyone do it?

Everyone can learn to land yacht. We offer courses from as little as one hour, though obviously to be good you'll have to train a lot.

Your favourite spot?

Right here. It's the place I know best and you'll often find that in competition it's the locals who win.

ITINERARIES

Best Beaches

The whole Belgian Coast is one long stretch of sandy, gentle beach, but as you amble along between resorts you'll find each town has its very own atmosphere and activities. With everything from friendly beach clubs to secluded dunes and glitz and glamour, there's something to keep everyone happy.

De Panne has the widest stretch of beach along the coast and it was here in 1898 that **land yachting** (www.lazef.be) was born. Take a lesson and try your hand at this exciting sport or head further along the sands to try out some **kitesurfing**. Heading east, stop off in **Oostduinkerke** to see fishers trawling for shrimp on horseback – it's the only place in the world it's done this way. Continue on to **Oostende** with its long promenade, beachside stalls, shops, bars and restaurants before heading to undeveloped **Bredene** where the untouched dunes offer a wilder side to coastal life. In **Blankenberge** you'll find lots of activities for children, from the 1930s **pier** (☎50-43 37 50;

www.belgiumpier.be) to the **Sea Life Marine Park** (☎50-42 43 00; www.sealife.be; Koning Albert 1 Laan 116; adult/child €16.50/13). And for those who wish to see and be seen there's glamorous **Knokke-Heist**, where a space on the beach comes at a premium and the flashy **casino** (☎50-63 05 00; www.casinoknokke.be; Zeedijk-Alberstrand 509) showcases art by Keith Haring and Rene Magritte.

Images provided by Westtoer



Great Outdoors

With large and small nature reserves, polders and dunes to explore – and a coastal walking network – there's plenty of space here to walk, bike and discover. But if water sports are more your thing, then just pick a spot and hit the beach, you'll find everything from kitesurfing and sea kayaking to wake boarding and waterskiing all along the coast.

In **De Panne**, the Flemish nature reserve **De Westhoek** is a wild area of ancient, rolling dunes riddled with walking trails. The highest dune along the coast, however, is **Hoge Blekker** (33m) in **Koksijde**. Further east in **Nieuwpoort** you can take an exhilarating Zodiac tour with **Wavecarting** (☎58-23 14 75; www.wavekarting.com; Watersportlaan 15/2), try your hand at **windsurfing** (www.kokoloco.be) or visit **IJzermording** (www.natuurpunt.be), an area of mudflats, salt marshes and dunes on the bank of the IJzer. The beach at **Middelkerke** is perfect for kitesurfing and swimming. Try the **Twins Club** (www.twinsclub.be) in **Bredene** for a chance to surf and sail on this superb stretch of undeveloped coast or head to **Duinbossen** (www.natuurenbos.be)

in **De Haan**, a protected area of dune woods that links to **Wenduine**. In glitzy **Knokke-Heist** the whole family can try a range of water sports at **Surfer's Paradise** (www.surfersparadise.be). Alternatively, head to the coast's largest reserve, **Zwin Nature Park** (www.west-vlaanderen.be/zwin), where the sea marshes provide a habitat for many rare plants such as rock samphire and sea lavender and are an important breeding ground for migratory birds.

Cycling

The Belgian Coast was made for exploring on two wheels and you'll see cyclists (and bike rentals) everywhere. It's easy on the legs, there's plenty to see and an 86km *kustfietsroute*, coastal cycling route, to follow. More cultural exploration than personal challenge, it's a great option for all the family.

Jump in head first with a circuit of the 25km **mountain bike trail** through **De Panne's** dunes and polders, or warm up gently with an easy ride to **Koksijde** and stop off at the **Paul Delvaux Museum** (☎58-52 12 29; www.delvauxmuseum.com; Av Paul Delvaux laan 42; adult/child €8/6) for a look at the work of one of



Blankenberge Pier, the Belgian Coast

Belgium's most famous artists. In **Nieuwpoort** check out the wonderful bronze sculpture of a turtle *Searching for Utopia*, admire the boats and ride out to the historic **lighthouse**. Head on to **Oostende** and cycle along the seafront to atmospheric **Fort Napoleon** (☎59-32 00 48; www.fortnapoleon.be; adult/child €5/2) and the **Earth Explorer** (☎59-70 59 59; www.earthexplorer.be; Fortstraat 128b; adult/child €15/11) science centre. The quiet roads and picturesque houses of **De Haan** are quite a contrast and their history is

explained in the **Belle Époque Centre** (☎50-42 87 41; www.belle-epoque.blankenberge.be; Elisabethstraat 24; adult/child €3/1) in **Blankenberge**. From here it's a short trek to **Zeebrugge** to explore the **Maritime Park** (☎50-55 14 15; www.seafront.be; Vismijnstraat 7; adult/child €10.50/8.50) with its pirate island, lighthouse and Russian submarine.

For more information visit www.dekust.be.

URL provided by Westtoer

EATING

From beachfront street stalls to Michelin-starred restaurants, the Belgian Coast will spoil seafood lovers for choice. Shrimp is a local staple and comes in croquettes, stuffed in tomatoes (*tomate crevette*), and served with sole and a white wine sauce (*sole à l'ostendaise*). For dessert just try and resist those luscious Belgian chocolates and steaming waffles.

Jardin Tropical (☎50-61 07 98; www.jardintropical.be; Zwaluwenlaan 12, Knokke-Heist) A young, innovative chef and staff who seem truly passionate about food make a visit here something to remember. Ingredients are combined to spectacular effect and the tapas-style lunch makes eating at this unpretentious Michelin-starred restaurant a surprisingly affordable option. Book ahead.

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

Grand Cabaret (☎493 72 96 51; www.grandcabaret.be; Quay 12, Nieuwpoort) Deep-red wallpaper and black-and-white photos give this place a nostalgic, laid-back feel. The food, however, is whipped up by a young, adventurous chef and his classic dishes are crafted with a compelling, modern twist.

De Oesterput (☎50-41 10 35; www.oesterput.com; Wenduïse Steenweg 16, Blankenberge) Hidden down some backstreets, this wonderful seafood restaurant is set in a converted warehouse. Its informal atmosphere, good-value dishes and attentive service make it a great option, with lobster and mussels a house speciality.

De Normandie (☎58-51 81 41; www.denormandie.be; Koninklijke Baan 1, Oostduinkerke) Kids will love this giant boat stranded in the dunes between Koksijde and Oostduinkerke. Serving excellent regional food in a trendy, modern setting, it's a good option for the whole family.

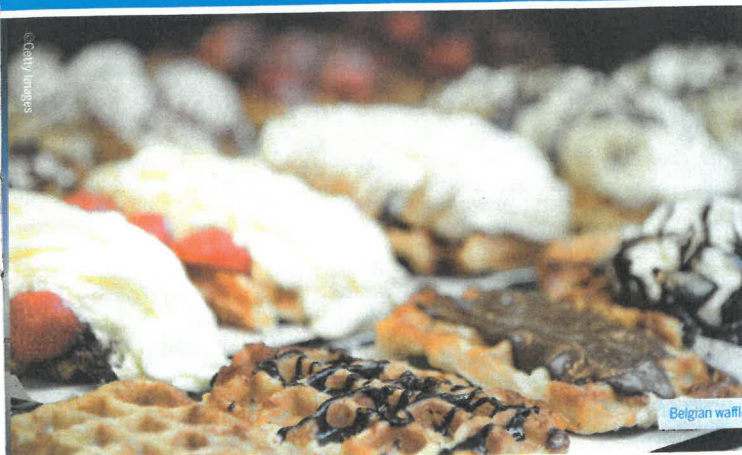
Poincaré (☎50-42 32 78; www.poincare-restaurant.be; Delacensieriestraat 21, Wenduïne) Set in a bright

townhouse with large windows, wooden tables and an informal atmosphere, this homely place serves deceptively simple seasonal dishes that will defy your expectations.

Bistro de Kruidenmolen (☎59-23 51 78; www.kruidenmolen.be; Dorpsstraat 1, Klemskerke) Just inland from De Haan, this cosy, rustic place is supposedly the local favourite of award-winning chefs, and certainly its modest surroundings belie the quality of food on offer. The menu features traditional Belgian dishes cooked with contemporary flair.

Bistro Mathilda (☎59-51 06 70; www.bistromathilda.be; Leopold II Laan 1, Oostende) This slick, modern place is best known for its wonderful steak tartare. The menu features mainly French and Belgian brasserie-style dishes, and despite the minimalist decor, the atmosphere is warm and intimate.

La Coupole (☎58-41 54 54; www.la-coupole.be; Nieuwpoortlaan 9, De Panne) Sleek and sophisticated, this popular restaurant exudes an air of refinement yet is a remarkably popular choice with families. The innovative menu focuses predominantly, but not exclusively, on fish and seafood.



SLEEPING

The Belgian Coast is a popular summer destination and the choice of accommodation in the area reflects this. You'll find everything from campsites and youth hostels to atmospheric B&Bs, self-catering cottages and slick hotels. For July and August it's best to book well ahead.

Mondo Hotel (☎59-70 08 06; www.mondohotels.eu; Léon Spilliaertstraat 1, Oostende; doubles €89-119) Set in a historic building near the

seafront, this hip and trendy joint blends modern minimalism with art deco chic. The 'cosy' rooms are pretty compact – upgrade if you can – but the public areas are a treat.

Maison de la Mer (☎58-52 38 88; www.maisondelamer.be; Koninklijke Baan 215, Koksijde; doubles €110-125) Oozing an air of gentle refinement, this timelessly elegant guesthouse is all whitewashed walls and neutral tones. The charming rooms offer a tasteful splash

☆ AUTHOR'S PICK

Suite 17 (☎479 47 47 22; www.suite17.be; leperstraat 17, Nieuwpoort; doubles €95-110) More like a boutique hotel than a small guesthouse, this stunning garden house is peppered with vintage and designer furniture and an air of effortless cool. With a private swimming pool, cosy communal areas and just three rooms, it's simply one of a kind.

of colour but continue the contemporary classic styling.

Ter Zilte (☎58-24 33 74; www.terzilte.be; Marktstraat 19, Nieuwpoort; doubles €90-114) Modern and stylish yet remarkably cosy, this intimate boutique hotel has six individually designed rooms. It's a really special place to stay, with incredible attention to detail, impeccable service and a wonderful sense of tranquillity.

De Coqisserie (☎59-43 00 43; www.decoqisserie.be; Koninklijke Baan 29, De Haan; doubles €105) Nestled in the evocative streets of historic De Haan, this thoroughly modern guesthouse offers a series of uncluttered rooms and apartments. Contemporary design, slick bathrooms and glorious sea views make the experience.

Hotel Oxalis (☎58-52 08 79; www.hoteloxalis.com; Lejeunelaan 12, Koksijde; doubles €89-130) Subtle florals, antique furniture, claw-footed baths and classic styling combine to give this lovely B&B an air of genteel sophistication. There's a pretty garden terrace and a self-catering cottage if you'd like to stay longer.

Hotel Hof ter Doest (☎50-54 40 82; www.terdoest.be; Ter Doeststraat 4, Lissewege; doubles €150) This 17th-century abbey farmhouse is set in a historic village just a few kilometres from Zeebrugge. A thorough restoration has created six bright, modern rooms with exposed beams and oodles of space.



Wenduine, the Belgian coast

Image provided by iStockphoto

LOCAL PRODUCE

Belgium is most famous for its chocolate and you'll find specialist shops in every town. Look out for chocolate seashells and *babelutten*, soft caramels, both typical treats along the coast. Good buys also include Belgian beer, fresh seafood and soft cheeses. Most towns have a local market – when you arrive, ask what day it's on.

Delvaux (☎59-70 12 98; www.delvaux.com; Adolf Buylstraat 23-25, Oostende) The world's largest fine-leather-goods brand, Delvaux has been making luxuriously stylish bags since 1829. It's a Belgian success story and its creations are a favourite of European royalty.

Vistrap (Visserskaai, Oostende) Oostende's picturesque fish market, with its numerous stalls and tempting fish, shouldn't

be missed. Stroll along the Visserskaai to admire the fishing vessels and stop at one of the many stands that line the promenade to pick up some shrimp, mussels, crab or herring to eat while you walk.

Patrick De Brock Gallery (☎50-62 13 09; www.patrickdebrock.com; Strandstraat 11, Knokke-Heist) You'll be spoilt for choice when it comes to contemporary art in Knokke-Heist – just stroll along Kustlaan where galleries are shoulder to shoulder. Patrick de Brock specialises in young, contemporary artists and has previously featured work by many leading international names such as Robert Mapplethorpe and Julian Opie.

Demeester (☎59-50 92 16; www.demeester-delicatessen.be; Gistelsesteenweg

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

Chocolatier M (☎50-61 44 60; www.chocolatier-m.be; Sylvain Dupuisstraat 38, Knokke-Heist) For chocolate heaven head for this little shop on a quiet street in Knokke, exclusive supplier to some of Europe's most celebrated restaurants. Handmade with incredible attention to detail and decorated with delicate designs, this is chocolate like you've never seen, or tasted, before.



Fish market at Oostende, the Belgian coast

78, Oostende) A little out of the centre but well worth the effort, this wonderful delicatessen stocks the best cheeses, meats and country produce in town. If you're looking for typical Belgian farm produce it's the place to go.

't Koelschip (☎493 63 45 38; www.koelschip.be; Van Iseghemlaan 101, Oostende) If you'd like to take some of Belgium's finest brews home try this speciality shop which stocks over 400 varieties. Run by a dedicated beer lover,

it promotes smaller, craft breweries and can offer excellent advice on what to buy.

Moeder Babelutte (☎50-41 21 72; www.moederbabelutte.com; Kerkstraat 70, Blankenberge) Making traditional Belgian sweets since 1850, Moeder Babelutte started out selling treats to seaside tourists but is now a household name along the coast. You'll find outlets selling traditional *cuberdons* (red candy cones), boiled sweets and chocolate seashells in most coastal towns.



**LOCAL VOICE: DAVID MAENHOUT,
BELGIAN CHOCOLATE AMBASSADOR**

What makes Belgian chocolate so special?

Belgium has a long tradition of making chocolate, so we've had many years to refine our skills and research the processes involved. Consequently, the quality of chocolate here is some of the best in the world.

What's your passion?

We make fusion chocolates and experiment with ingredients to create new flavour combinations. I like chocolate with fresh fruit –

our chocolate with blood orange jelly is one of my favourites – or unexpected flavours like basil. Our newest uses one of the last artisan soy sauces in the world to achieve *umami*, the fifth taste.

How do you do it?

Quality is hugely important to us. We only use the best grade of chocolate and pay attention to detail. I am a perfectionist and what we do can't be done on a large scale.

David works at Chocolatier M.

INLAND DAY TRIPS

Just 30km from Oostende, **Bruges** is a picture-postcard medieval city of gabled houses, meandering canals and picturesque squares. It's often referred to as the 'Venice of the north' and makes an ideal day-trip from the coast. Start your visit with a climb up the iconic **belfry** for panoramic views over the city, then wander the winding cobbled streets to discover hidden churches, whitewashed almshouses and little shrines. In the **Burg** you can see 700 years of architecture, including the impressive Town Hall. Close by is the **Groeningemuseum** with its wonderful collection of Flemish art, and the **Gruuthuse Museum** with its historic tapestries, furniture and ceramics. Or, for a better understanding of Belgium's sweetest export, visit the fascinating **Choco Story**.

Another worthwhile excursion from the coast is **Diksmuide**, an area flooded during World War I in the hope of preventing the German army from reaching the sea. Consequently the town became the hub of Belgian resistance. You can visit the



fascinating **Dodengang**, the 'Trench of Death', a preserved trench system on the outskirts of town, and the **IJzertoren peace memorial** which houses a World War I museum. Nearby the **Vladslo Cemetery** is the final resting place of over 25,000 German soldiers and home to the famous *Grieving Parents* sculpture by Käthe Kollwitz. Diksmuide town was razed during the war but was later rebuilt in Flemish style.

THIS IS PAS-DE-CALAIS

Pas-de-Calais is a great place for walking, water sports, eating, drinking and exploring appealing towns.

Dunes of Slack, Pas-de-Calais

Image provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourisme E. Desautels

Interwoven with history and lined with silky beaches, dunes and dramatic cliffs, Pas-de-Calais is an oft-overlooked gem. It's edged by the Côte d'Opale (Opal Coast), named for the way it reflects the light, with an ever-changing palette of blues, pinks, mauves and greens, stretching for 120km between Calais and Berck-sur-Mer.

It's strange to think that such a peaceful area, with its rolling hills, canals, Flemish-flavoured towns and family-friendly beaches, has been a battleground, both between the French and the English, and later during the World Wars, but reminders speckle the coast: in moss-covered concrete bunkers, some fascinating museums, and the sobering Étaples war cemetery. Yet there are many more attractions here than the relics of war – Pas-de-Calais is a great place for walking, water sports, eating, drinking and exploring appealing towns.

Many people zoom past on their way to better-known areas of France, but those who stop to explore will find the wealth of gentle and diverse pleasures that make this the perfect spot for an easy-going break.

HIGHLIGHTS

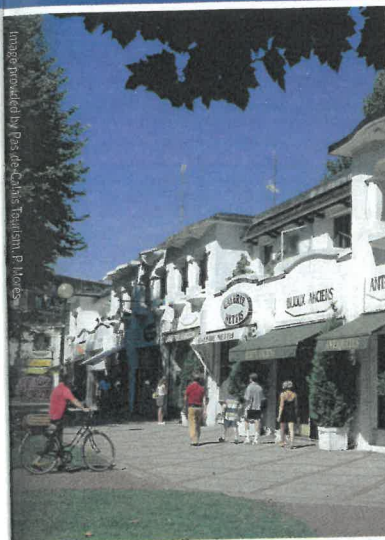
Visiting the Pas-de-Calais unveils a delightful clutch of experiences: a long lunch of glistening mussels and delicious French fries on a sunny day in the fishing village of **Audresselles**, exploring the dunes backing the dramatic **Baie d'Authie**, just south of Berck, and wandering the picturesque streets of **Boulogne's old quarter** after visiting the town's world-class **aquarium**. **Calais** itself has a **beach** of surprisingly pristine, soft sand and a breathtakingly contemporary new lace and fashion **museum**, where you can see a lace machine clank into glorious action. The town is also having its **cathedral** restored, almost 70 years after it was damaged in World War II.

Then, there are the wild heights of **Cap Gris Nez** or **Cap Blanc Nez**, from where you can sight England's White Cliffs across the periwinkle-blue Channel – from here, England looks so close, it seems an easy swim. Further along the coast there is genteel, seaside **Wimereux**,

« The region around the two Caps has been granted prestigious Grand Site de France status »

Information provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourism

founded by Napoleon, which still retains its 19th-century flavour in its colourful villas and car-free promenade. Next is the leafy resort of **Le Touquet**, long a favourite of the English – a head-in-the-sand PG Wodehouse was arrested here by the Germans in 1940. If you get the chance, head inland on some day trips: visit **Arras'** subterranean tunnels and perfect Flemish squares, take boats around the rural canals and waterways that lie close to the town of **Saint-Omer**, or do water sports on or mountainbike around the **lake** close to **Ardres**. Pas-de-Calais offers the potential for more activities too, from walking along waymarked trails to kitesurfing, skidding across the waves.



Clockwise from top left: Le Touquet, Pas-de-Calais; Ambleuse fort, Pas-de-Calais; Kites at Berck-sur-Mer, Pas-de-Calais



**LOCAL VOICE: ANNIE WALGRAEF,
CALAIS GREETER**

What is special about this area?

I love it here, because I love the seaside, and people are so welcoming. Calais has a beautiful cathedral, Notre Dame, which was destroyed by British bombs during World War II, but a fantastic team is rebuilding it; it should be finished by summer 2012.

What about activities?

We have a sailing school at Lac d'Ardres, at Sangatte you can

go horseriding along the beach, you can go kitesurfing – there's loads to do along the coast.

Which is the best beach?

Calais! This stretch is so big, it's never crowded. You can walk as far as Cap Blanc Nez at low tide, and Sangatte at high tide. It's very fine sand all the way along, and we don't have sea pollution because the currents are good.

ITINERARIES

Activities

Pas-de-Calais is a fantastic place for activities, especially water sports. As well as a balmy coastline, it has a network of canals and rivers inland, and you can pitch up and hire a boat to glide along the waterways or a kite-board to flit along the beach.

Start your trip in **Calais**, where there is a broad beach and the **City of Lace & Fashion** (☎03 21 00 42 30; www.cite-dentelle.fr; 135 quai du Commerce), a cutting-edge museum that's housed in an updated 19th-century lace factory. Along the coast, **Sangatte's** broad sandy beach is ideal for **kitesurfing**, and you can arrange to canter along the beach on horseback. The next major stop is **Wimereux**, ideal for some old-fashioned lazing on the sand, and lunching on the promenade. Next up is historic **Boulogne-sur-Mer**, where you can see seals and sharks in the marvellous, beach-side **Nausicaà** (☎03 21 30 99 99; www.nausicaa.fr; bd Ste-Beuve) **Boulogne's** stage-set pretty walled town rewards a wander, with an interesting **castle museum**. Finally, head further



along the coast and take your pick between **sand yachting** or **kitesurfing** along the wide sandy beaches close to **Berck** or **Le Touquet**. In neighbouring **Étaples**, it's worth visiting the **Maréis** (☎03 21 09 04 00; www.mareis.fr; bd Bigot Desceliers), an interactive museum about sea-fishing where you can find out what it's like to go to sea in a 24ft trawler.

Walking

There are over 3000km of signposted footpaths around Pas-de-Calais, winding through pretty towns and villages, along rolling coastal landscapes, and inland around the Saint-Omer marshlands and the wooded hills of the Arras region. For many of these you can download route information (in French, but with clear maps) from the Pas-de-Calais website at www.uk.pas-de-calais.com.

Starting around 7km east of Calais, there's a circular waymarked 11km walk from **Oye-Plage** that's ideal for bird watchers. Head east along the coast, and there are the dizzying viewpoints at **Cap Gris Nez** and **Blanc Nez**, from where you can see the White Cliffs of England's coast, and walks along the coastal paths from both headlands, from where you can observe the swirling birdlife as well as overgrown defensive buildings from WWII.

Head to **Boulogne** for lunch in the old town, where you can walk around the circuit of the **medieval ramparts**, which trace the layout of what was once a Roman camp. After lunch, you can choose between walking part of a lovely

figure-of-eight 10km meander from the nearby graceful small town of **Wimereux**, starting at the **Botanical Gardens of La Baie Saint Jean**, or go further along the coast to sample one of France's great GR routes, starting from **Le Touquet**. You can follow the latter up to 24km along the water's edge, passing through sand dunes, marsh and rough shore grasses.

Best Beaches

There's no need to head to the south of France to find good beaches – the Opal Coast has some wonderful expanses of sand, with good facilities near the towns, and peace and quiet if you head away from them. Resorts tend to be homely and family-oriented, ideal for such simple pleasures as a pancake on the promenade, street-side cafes, or a trip on a merry-go-round.

Calais itself has a surprisingly inviting **beach** that stretches past the neighbouring small town of **Sangatte** with a broad swathe of smooth sand. The part nearest to Calais itself is backed by some breeze-block buildings, but these are all low-rise and harbour some cheerful family restaurants.



Sand yacht competition, Pas-de-Calais

The ideal lunch stop on your itinerary is **Audresselles**, a fishing village fronted by a pebble **beach**, where houses are built above the **bunkers** that have now almost merged into the landscape. The simple restaurants are famous for their seafood, and get packed out with people eating piles of fresh fish. Recharged, you can go on to relax on the **beach** at **Wimereux**, a town backed by colourful villas with a hint of

New Orleans style. The beach at **Boulogne** merits a visit for its wonderful, waterside aquarium, **Nausicaà** (☎03 21 30 99 99; www.nausicaa.fr; bd Ste-Beuve). Nearby **Hardelot** offers a range of family-focused activities, and there are more great, wide swimming **beaches** at **Berck-sur-Mer** and **Le Touquet**.

For more information visit www.uk.pas-de-calais.com.
URL provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourism

EATING

One of the great joys of holidaying on this stretch of coast is settling down to a languorous meal, and eateries range from basic-but-delicious restaurants specialising in *moules frites* (mussels and French fries) to venues that proffer sophisticated Michelin-starred splendour.

Le Garden (☎06 86 99 62 94; www.legarden.net; 26 bd Gambetta, Calais; meals around €15-25) This small, family-run restaurant faces the grand 19th-century Calais Theatre. It is a simple but good place that's ideal for families and – we're reliably told – has the best steaks in Calais.

Retour du Flobart (☎03 21 33 85 84; www.leretourdesflobards.fr; 58 Rue Marin la Meslée, Audresselles; meals around €20-30) In a small fishing village 19km north of Boulogne, laid-back, busy Flobart (a type of boat) has lots of streetside tables. Everyone comes to eat piles of fresh fish and delicious *moules* (mussels).

La Liégeoise (☎03 21 32 41 01; www.atlantic-delpierre.com; Digue de Mer, Wimereux; meals around €50; ☎ Tue-Sat lunch, Mon-Sat dinner) The seafront, art deco-style Atlantic hotel houses Wimereux's most upmarket restaurant, with several affordable menus (starting from €29). Its L'Alloze bar offers less formal, cheaper eating.

Les Oyats (☎03 21 33 59 41, Digue de Mer, Wimereux; meals around €15-25) Also with a seafront terrace, this easygoing brasserie is perfect for a relaxed family meal, with simple dishes such as grilled meat or fish, pizzas and crepes.

La Matelote (☎03 21 30 17 97; www.la-matelote.com; 80 bd Ste-Beuve, Boulogne; menus €29-75) Michelin-starred, this intimate place has gleaming white tablecloths, fine porcelain and equally fine, beautifully presented food; there's also a terrace.

L'Îlot Vert (☎06 86 21 76 64; 36 Rue Lille, Boulogne; meals around €35-50) This small, elegant, contemporary-styled restaurant is always packed; come here for delectable creative cuisine and a warm welcome.

Aux Pêcheurs d'Étaples (☎03 21 94 06 90; www.auxpecheursdetaples.fr; Quai de la Canche, Étaples; menus €18-65) Next to Étaples port, this jauntily blue-and-white restaurant specialises, of course, in fish and seafood.

Le Paris (☎03 21 05 79 33; 88 rue de Metz, Le Touquet; meals €30-60) With a warm welcome and excellent food Le Paris is a find, located close to the town market. The cooking is imaginative, and there's a children's menu.

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

Histoire Ancienne (☎03 21 34 11 20; www.histoire-ancienne.com; 20 rue Royale, Calais; lunch & dinner 6-8pm Mon-Fri; meals around €25-45; ☎ closed Sun & dinner Mon) With dark wood and intricate tiled floors, this feels like a 1930s Parisienne bistro and specialises in French and regional cooking.



Mussels and French fries at Pas-de-Calais

Image provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourism, Le Littéraire

SLEEPING

Pas-de-Calais' accommodation encompasses country houses, spick-and-span hostels, upmarket seafront hotels and atmospheric B&Bs: whatever your budget and taste, you'll find something to appeal. Tourist offices dotted along the coast and in the main inland towns will assist in finding places to stay.

Hôtel Meurice (☎03 21 34 57 03; www.hotel-meurice.fr; 5-7 rue Edmond Roche, Calais; doubles €85-150) An atmospheric Calais hotel, this has 39 rooms, a grand lobby staircase, vintage bar and a breakfast room with garden views.

Auberge de Jeunesse (☎03 21 34 70 20; www.auberge-jeunesse-calais.com; av Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny, Calais; single incl breakfast €26, 2-bed dm per person €20; ☎24hr) Perfectly placed for Calais beach, this modern hostel has 162 beds. The area behind the beach is fairly built-up and

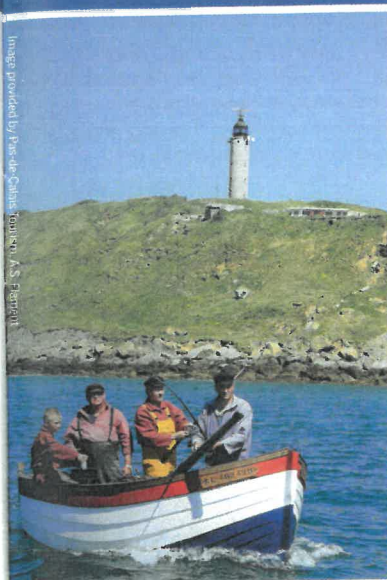
nondescript, but the *plage* itself is a winner, with powdery golden sand and lots of facilities.

Petit Tambour (☎03 21 36 25 38; www.petit-tambour.com; 288 rue de Louches, Autingues; doubles €80) Only 16km from Calais, close to Ardres, this place has rooms in the converted stables and outhouses of an 18th-century country mansion. It's like Delft pottery come to life, all white with blue shutters; rooms are charming, with a country feel.

Hôtel Le Vivier (☎03 21 35 93 61; www.levivier.com; place de l'Église, Wissant; doubles incl breakfast €60-90) Midway between Calais and Boulogne, in the small coastal town of Wissant, this modest hotel has 39 comfortable rooms with sea views, and a restaurant with a jaunty nautical theme.

★ AUTHOR'S PICK

Enclos de l'Évêché (☎03 91 90 05 90; www.endosdeleveche.com; 6 Rue de Pressy, Boulogne sur Mer; doubles €70-120) An elegant guesthouse set in a great location next to the cathedral in the walled city, it has distinctive rooms, each uniquely decorated, above its popular restaurant.



Left: Cap Gris Nez, Pas-de-Calais; Right: Wimereux, Pas-de-Calais

Hotel Atlantic (☎03 21 32 41 01; www.atlantic-delpierre.com; Digue de Mer, Wimereux; doubles €130-220) This traditional seafront hotel has been given a makeover and now all rooms are sea-facing, with contemporary, sleek decor. Big sliding windows give out onto big sea views.

Hôtel La Matelote (☎03 21 30 33 33; www.la-matelote.com; 70 bd Ste-Beuve; doubles Sun-Thu €100-160, Fri, Sat & holidays €115-185) Boulogne's finest has 35 warmly decorated rooms, some

of which come with balconies, as well as jacuzzi, *hammam* (Turkish bath), and sauna. Wheelchair access available.

Hotel Westminster (☎03 21 05 48 48; westminster-spa.hotel-rv.com; Avenue Du Verger, Le Touquet; doubles €175-300) Full of vintage splendour, the Westminster is the great Le Touquet landmark, a grand old hotel with great sweeping art deco staircase and polished lift, and genteel, if rather faded, rooms.

LOCAL PRODUCE

Many people come to Pas-de-Calais with shopping on their minds, primed to pick up wine, cheese, beer, biscuits, seafood and the other delicious foodstuffs for which France is renowned. There are fantastic farm shops, artisanal producers and fruit and vegetable markets, such as those in Le Touquet and Berck. In most towns, such as Calais, Boulogne and Étaples, there are fish markets where you can browse the catch of the day.

La Maison du Fromage et des Vins (☎03 21 34 44 72; 1 rue Gershell, Calais) The best place in Calais to buy cheese, run by the gastro-nomic duo the Crespo brothers. Delicacies include local speciality *maroilles*, a flavoursome, soft cow's-milk cheese.

2-Caps Brewery (☎03 21 10 56 53; www.2caps.fr; Ferme de Belle Dalle,

Tardingen) Between caps Blanc Nez and Gris Nez, this micro-brewery occupies the former stables of a fine farmhouse. You can take a 90-minute tour (including tastings) and try some delicious craft beers.

La Sablière (☎03 21 87 36 95; www.lasabliere-wimereux.fr; 68 rue Carnot, Wimereux) For delicate *macarons*, star-shaped petit fours and a wealth of other biscuits, head to this dream of a shop, where even the walls are piped in a delicious-looking raspberry-pink.

Fromagerie Sainte Godeleine (☎03 21 87 00 97; Ferme du Vent Rue du Vert, Wierre-Effroy) Brothers Antoine and Joachim Bernard produce up to 20,000 cheeses at their farm, 20km inland from Wimereux; you can sample local cheeses including *Sablé de Wissant* and *Fleur d'Audresselles*.

☆ AUTHOR'S PICK

Philippe Olivier Fromagerie (☎03 21 31 94 74; www.philippeolivier.fr; 43 rue Thiers, Boulogne) If you died and went to cheese heaven, it would be something like this famous, family-run shop, which has been purveying local cheeses since 1907. It sells myriad pungent delights, including speciality 'Le Vieux Boulogne'.

JC David (☎03 21 87 38 31; www.jcdavid.fr; 15-17 rue Georges Honoré, Boulogne) The herring industry in Boulogne stretches back to the 15th century, and this institution has been selling exquisite vacuum-packed herring and smoked salmon since 1970.

Au Chat Bleu (☎03 21 05 03 86; 47 Bis rue St Jean) Two elderly sisters opened this Touquet chocolatier in 1912, naming it after some local blue Persian cats. It has been in its present

location since 1929, selling absurdly quaint, work-of-art chocolates, many decorated with feline motifs.

Beussent Chocolates (☎03 21 86 17 62; www.choco-france.com; 66 route de Desvres, Beussent) Inland from Étaples, this twinkling chocolate shop and factory is run by the De Rick family, chocolatiers who have their own cocoa plantation in Peru. If you don't make it here, the chocolates are on sale at outlets in Pas-de-Calais towns.



Fresh seafood platter at Pas-de-Calais

Image provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourism, F. Desautels



LOCAL VOICE: TONY RÉGNIER, CHEF

Tell us about your restaurant, L'Îlot Vert, in Boulogne.

My kitchen is above all based on fresh, seasonal market produce. The idea behind the restaurant is a balance between price and quality, with a lunch menu at €16 that changes daily and a menu at €28 that evolves with the seasons.

What foods would you recommend people try in Pas-de-Calais?

The salmon and red herrings produced by JC David, as well

as the cheeses of Mr Philippe Olivier in Boulogne-sur-Mer. *La gainée boulonnaise* is a fish dish based on *crevettes grises* (gray prawns) and mussels that is so celebrated that a local festival is organized annually in spring especially for it.

Where would you recommend visitors go in the Pas-de-Calais area?

The aquarium Nausicaä, the ramparts of the old city of Boulogne, and the Caps Gris Nez and Blanc Nez.

INLAND DAY TRIPS

Only 40km from Calais is the town of **Saint-Omer**, which has a Flemish-flavoured, restaurant-lined main square and the region's only gothic cathedral, **Notre Dame**, housing a gloriously baroque organ. Yet what's most beguiling about the town is what lies nearby, the lovely **Audomarois marshes**, a beautiful place to explore on foot or by boat, lined in places by neat market gardens. Don't miss an opportunity to meander around these lovely waterways, passing windmills and birdlife on the lush canals. Just north of Saint-Omer, at **Clairmarais**, **Isnor** (www.isnor.fr) hires canoes, motorised craft and rowing boats, as well as bikes, and runs boat trips.

Must-see **Arras** is an easy trip inland, 108km southeast of Calais. The town centres around its two **main squares**: Grand (Big) and Petit (Small) Places, which are surrounded by Flemish **merchant houses**. Pleasingly symmetrical and curvaceous, they look like pieces of lavish gingerbread. It's a pleasure to sit in a square in the morning, enjoying a fresh croissant and a *café au lait*.



Another treat is the *Deposition* by Rubens in the lovely **Eglise Saint Jean Baptiste** (1 bis rue Wacquez Glasson). Arras is a name that resonates with WWI history, and as well as the pleasures above ground there are the chilling yet fascinating **souterrains** (tunnels) beneath the Petit Place, which were turned into command posts, hospitals and barracks during WWI.

TRANSPORT

KENT

Bicycle Mostly flat and crossed by virtually car-free country lanes, Kent is perfect for two-wheeled adventuring. National Cycle Routes 1, 2 and 18 cross the region. There are plenty of bike hire and repair shops along the coast. **For further information visit www.kent.gov.uk/explorekent where you can find all you need to know about cycle routes in Kent.**

URL provided by Visit Kent

Car The M20 London-Folkestone motorway is Kent's main transport artery, followed by the M2/A2/A299 route from the capital to Thanet. Other useful routes include the A256 Dover-Broadstairs road which passes near St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, Sandwich and Ramsgate, the A2 between Canterbury and Dover, and the A257 linking Canterbury with Sandwich. Eurotunnel (www.eurotunnel.com) runs shuttles from Calais to Folkestone up to four times an hour.

Local Transport You can get almost anywhere in Kent by bus, with frequent, inexpensive

services operated by Stagecoach (www.stagecoachbus.com). See also www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk/se.

Rail Although Eurostar trains (www.eurostar.com) hurtle between London, France and Belgium via the Eurotunnel, few services actually stop in Kent (only three-a-day at Ashford International station).

New high-speed Javelin trains make the London St Pancras-Margate run in one hour 30 minutes and zip down to Dover in just over an hour. Other slower trains operated by Southeastern Trains (www.southeasternrailway.co.uk) run from London's Charing Cross and Victoria stations to most Kent towns. However bus is often preferable to train when travelling around Kent by public transport, as there are a greater number of direct services.

A fun way to see the coast between Hythe and Dungeness is aboard the narrow-gauge Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway (www.rhdr.org.uk).

Sea Ramsgate and Dover both have direct ferry links to France and Belgium. Dover is the

main port for cross-Channel sailings with DFDS (www.dfdsseaways.co.uk), Seafrance (www.seafrance.com) and P&O Ferries (www.poferries.com). Euroferries (www.euroferries.co.uk) and Transeuropa Ferries (www.transeuropaferries.co.uk) operate out of Ramsgate.

THE BELGIAN COAST

Bicycle Flat roads, dedicated bike lanes and courteous drivers make cycling the Belgian Coast a dream. There's also an extensive network of numbered cycle trails, accompanying maps and bike rental in almost every town.

For further information on cycle and walking routes, visit www.dekust.be.

URL provided by Westtoer

Car Eurotunnel (www.eurotunnel.com) operates shuttles from Folkestone to Calais up to four times an hour, ferries run almost as regularly. From Calais or Dunkerque follow the E40 east to cross the Belgian border. There are no formalities and once in Belgium just turn off to whichever resort you choose. In summer these minor roads are very busy but conditions are good and there's

plenty of parking all along the coast. In towns you'll need to pay and display.

Local Transport By far the best way to get around is on the Coastal Tram (www.delijn.be/dekusttram) which runs the length of the coast from De Panne to Knokke-Heist. With over 70 stops en route and services every 10 minutes in high season, you can hop on and off wherever you fancy. Tickets cost €1.60 for a short hop or €6 for a day ticket. If you buy your tickets in advance from local newsagents or supermarkets they're slightly cheaper.

Rail Buy a Eurostar (www.eurostar.com) ticket to 'any Belgian station' and you can continue on from Brussels to De Panne, Koksijde, Oostende, Blankenberge or Knokke-Heist on domestic rail services (www.b-rail.be) within 24 hours of arrival.

Sea Car ferries ply the English Channel, one of the busiest shipping routes in the world, day and night. The Dover to Calais route is covered by Seafrance (www.seafrance.com) and P&O Ferries (www.poferries.com). DFDS Seaways

(www.fdfsseaways.co.uk) run from Dover to Dunkerque and Transeuropa Ferries (www.transeuropaferries.com) from Ramsgate to Oostende. Eurotunnel (www.eurotunnel.com) traverses Folkestone to Calais in only 35 minutes.

PAS-DE-CALAIS

Bicycle Pas-de-Calais is fine cycling territory, with waymarked routes and gentle hills. France loves cycling, so local drivers are generally courteous to cyclists. **For further information on cycle and walking routes, visit www.uk.pas-de-calais.com**

URL provided by Pas-de-Calais Tourism

Car The easiest way to reach Pas-de-Calais is by Eurotunnel (www.eurotunnel.com; 35 minutes), with prices from €30 per car. The station at Folkestone is accessible via the M20 or A2 from London, and both roads also connect to places in Kent.

In France, the fast A16 toll road is the quickest way along the coast to reach the Belgian Coast – though there are smaller, more scenic roads. In France, the A26 leads to Saint-Omer and on to Arras, but again smaller roads travel similar routes.

Parking is easy to find, but in some cases you will have to pay. In all towns there are usually well-marked car parks.

Local Transport Ingland (www.colvert-littoral.com, in French) runs buses along the coast, linking Pas-de-Calais towns. Calais has a free shuttle bus service around its centre, connecting with Calais Nord and the beach. Taxis are readily available.

Rail There are efficient and inexpensive rail connections within the region and beyond. Check the SNCF website (www.voyages-sncf.com). Gare Calais-Ville has regular direct services to Amiens, Boulogne and Dunkerque. For national and international services Gare Calais-Fréthun, a TGV station 10km southwest of Calais, is served by regular TGVs to Paris Gare du Nord (€41 to €62, 1½ hours) as well as Eurostars to London St Pancras (from €88, one hour).

Sea Usually the cheapest way to cross the Strait of Dover; trips take 1½ hours. P&O Ferries (www.poferries.com) and Sea-France (www.seafrance.com) are the only ferry companies that still take foot passengers.

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